



# Ashington Parish Council

## ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

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**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2022 at 7.45 p.m.**

**Present:** Councillors: N. Spiers (Chairman), J. Stillwell, M. Woolley, J. Morris, S. Ball, T. Watson, & T. Moss

**Also present:**

Clerk – Karen Dare

District Councillors – J Blackall & P. Circus

County Councillor – P Marshall

6 Members of the Public

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**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from: P. Kerrey, T. Kearney, G. MacPherson, P. Linehan

**Report from the Chairman of Ashington Parish Council on the Year 2021/22**

The Chairman reported:

Once again, the Council has had a challenging year, and it is testament to all councillors who have responded in a professional way to all the issues that have arisen. We have a great team of volunteers whose only motivation is to do the right thing for the village as a whole. All bring their own unique skills to the table, and we should be proud what we achieve collectively without any political bias.

The first 3 meetings of the year continued to be conducted remotely over Zoom due to Covid 19 restrictions, and it wasn't until June that we were able to meet as a whole face to face. This constantly changing landscape has not however prevented the Council in achieving some substantial landmarks throughout the year.

Firstly, the Ashington Neighbourhood Plan. After years of work this was completed early last year and went to the Planning Examiner whose recommendation was to go straight to Referendum. This happened in May. The village voted with an overwhelming majority to adopt the plan, 82.6% voting in favour. The residents realised that the final plan was the best option for village, taking our fair share of homes, balanced with good future assets for the village when development is complete. This really was a milestone and thanks to Karen who not only did the majority of the work but managed to keep the Council focused and on the straight and narrow. Subsequently the HDC Local Plan identified another small development site that should be incorporated into the Plan to take it from 2031 to 2036. This made sense protecting the village well into the future from potential overdevelopment.

Recently however with a change in the Leaders of HDC they seem to have torn up the Local Plan and by not having a 5-year land supply leave the whole District vulnerable to over enthusiastic developers. They seem to be relying on the Lesser Whirlpool Staghorn Snail and the resulting Water Neutrality policy as the protector against developers in the District. The world has gone mad, however, by having an adopted Neighbourhood Plan, and all the evidence that goes behind it, puts Ashington in a far better position than parishes without a Plan to fight any future battles with developers if they should occur.

This past year saw the Church pull out of the PC-Church Youth Partnership Agreement that provided youth work in the village. After running successfully for 7 years this was a

disappointment for the Parish Council and the Youth Club alike. Providing Youth work is a very expensive operation, absorbing about an 1/8 of the total income of the Parish Council. The AYC came to the PC with a request for continuing future PC funding. After some months of discussions, and with the help of the PC steering the AYC through the process so the village got value for money, a new agreement was reached. I am pleased to report the AYC is now going from strength to strength under the new regime. Special thanks to Graeme and Judith for assisting the AYC in this process that has resulted in a fantastic outcome.

The Parish Yard this year has been busy on two fronts. Firstly, short term we have managed to generate a reasonable income to partially offset the loss from Kite and Thomas vacating the Yard the previous year. Pop up take-aways, coffee vans and sales stalls have all used the Yard showing it is a good commercial site in the village. The medium-term vision is well on the way to being realised which is to install a tearoom. Plans have been developed, numerous surveys have been commissioned to make sure nothing has been missed and we are at the stage where planning permission has been applied for. This has been a huge project and thanks to those on the steering group with myself, namely Karen, Philip and Tony W. We have all had sleepless nights but there is light at the end of the tunnel.

A few thank you's as behind the scenes other councillors have been very busy. All Councillors turned out this time last year to plant a memorial hedge around the area near the Church. Many dragged their partners out with them so the whole hedge of over 150 hornbeam was planted in under an hour proving many hands make light work, and quite a bit of fun too. The Village signs have been replenished and are looking splendid, thanks to Philip and Terry, new noticeboards have been put up and a bench installed in Rectory Lane, again thanks to Terry. John and Paul have been working with the Wardens to make sure that Ashington gets the Warden coverage we desire. The finance team have done a sterling job controlling the purse strings. This year we have spent 95% of budget however we had more income than we thought and by being prudent have spent less than we budgeted. Thanks to the team of Malcolm, Graeme, Paul and Tony M.

Speedwatch is again up and running trying to get traffic to slow down especially on the Billingshurst Road that is becoming more and more of a rat run from the A29 to the A24 where drivers are trying to avoid the chaos at Buck Barn. Thanks to our volunteers and to Philip for organising along with Sam and Tony M, our PC volunteers.

Thanks to the planning team of Malcolm, Terry, Judith and John who have been busy with 43 planning applications this year. Worryingly we have also had 25 enforcement allegations this year. Is this ignorance of the planning rules or people trying to get away with it, probably 50/50.

John and Tony W our representatives with the ACCT and AYC and we would like to think that Paul is our representative with WSCC, or so we would like to think, having recently become a County Councillor.

None to this could happen without Karen, our Clerk, who is very much part of the team, keeping us in control, advising and protecting us from making rash decisions and charging off down rabbit holes. Thank you to her for her hard work and unrelenting support.

Lastly thank you to John Blackall and Paul Marshall, our resident District Councillor and County Councillors who not only attend almost every meeting but are also great supporters and friends of Ashington.

As I said at the start, all those around the table should be very proud of what we have achieved last year and in being part of a great team.

### **Report from District and County Councillors**

District Councillor John Blackall reported:

The Local Plan is delayed because of the Lesser Whirlpool Staghorn Snail – water extraction to serve homes and business is having a serious impact on this species and all new development needs to demonstrate Water Neutrality ie not increase the need for water. This will have a major effect on the local economy – no housebuilding, no new or expanding businesses, reduced income to HDC, parishes etc

Water Neutrality will not stop development forever. Water companies will eventually solve the problem, there are plans for new reservoirs to come on stream 2028-2030 and there are disused reservoirs that could be brought back on-stream quite quickly.

Cllr Blackall apologised to the Parish Council for HDC's failure to approve a Local Plan.

HDC has recently approved its own balanced budget and all Precept requests from Parishes, County etc

District Councillor Circus reported that:

District Councillor Circus reiterated his willingness to fight on behalf of Ashington as he has always done.

National Highways are currently consulting on an A27 Arundel bypass. This will alleviate problems in the Arundel area but still leave issues at Worthing & Chichester. There is some local opposition to the proposed scheme, but it will improve traffic flows in the wider area including Storrington & Cowfold. HDC supports the scheme and is asking for support from the wider geographical area so that local objectors don't derail the National Highways scheme.

A recent planning application in West Chiltington has demonstrated some of the difficulties with water neutrality, developer water consumption calculations based on questionable assumptions. HDC refused the application as Water Neutrality was not adequately demonstrated. It will be interesting if this goes to Appeal as the Planning Inspector will have to make a judgement and will indicate what water consumption, usage calculations etc are allowed.

HDC's 5-year Housing Land Supply is out of date, normally this would lead to speculative planning applications but all would still need to demonstrate Water Neutrality. Ashington has a Neighbourhood Plan, that allocates sites for a good number of homes, so it is in a much better position than some Parishes. It is frustrating that HDC's Tory ruling party cannot agree on a Local Plan.

County Councillor Paul Marshall reported:

[County Annual Report for Ashington Parish Council](#).

On 28<sup>th</sup> February the County Council adopted the Revenue and Capital Budget for 2022/2023. The Revenue for the budget will generate £648.5m.

West Sussex County Council are delivering on **investments, an example of which is listed below**, which will benefit our residents, communities and businesses, for an average Council Tax increase of **£45.18 on a Band D property**, which is the equivalent of an increase of **87 pence per week**, compared to last year's bill.

- o An additional **£24.2m** invested in **adult social care**, to support our most vulnerable residents when they need us
- o An additional **£6.2m** invested to support our children's services, including £350,000 for children's emotional wellbeing and mental health services
- o An additional **£3m for those who will struggle to pay their council tax**, making this a total of £6m spent over two years.
- o **investing £2.4m next year** to improve **the safety of our highways**, with a **capital investment of £21m** in our road maintenance programme **over the next five years**,

- o £20m capital investment in creating **more school places for SEND**.
- o An additional £10m in the capital programme to **tackle climate change within the county**

Locally I am pleased to have supported the Parish Council in challenging the large development expectations being placed on the village, however, you may be aware that all planning is suspended currently because the North Sussex water table is depleted and a water strategy needs to be developed, this could take some time. This impacts not only Horsham District Council but also Chichester and Crawley Local Authorities along with the South Down National Park and West Sussex County Council. Your Parish Council is well versed on this.

We are in the process of piloting food waste collections in two other districts. I welcome government legalisation that will mandate all Local Authorities to collect food waste. This will build on the current 53% county's recycling rates (currently ranking 5<sup>th</sup> in England) and when implemented this will achieve a target of over 60%. It is estimated that 40% general waste is food, or similar, is deposited in the general waste bins. The collection of food waste will be used to create energy as well as agricultural benefits.

As always it is a pleasure to represent Ashington and my contact details are Paul.Marshall@westsussex.gov.uk for any further information or assistance I can help with.

#### **Public Adjournment**

Questions were invited from Councillors & members of the public:

1. A resident raised the issue of potholes in Hillcrest Drive – there are many, they re-open regularly and are not being filled properly so repair teams are having to come out again and again.

County Councillor Paul Marshall confirmed that the contractors are Balfour Beatty, they must meet a specific repair standard, some temporary fixes take place when repairs are urgent, and the proper fix takes place some time later. WSCC has recently recruited more Highways Stewards to monitor the works.

Clerk to pass on residents' details to Paul Marshall so that he can follow-up directly with them.

The Chairman thanked all present and closed the meeting at 8.15pm

Signed ..... Dated .....